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REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

Morale kantienne et morale humaine. Par F. SARTIAUX. Paris, Hachette et Cie, 1917.—pp. vii, 463.

One of the deplorable accompaniments of the war is the perversion of perspective and the "Umwertung aller Werte" to which intense feeling has given rise even in the field of philosophical criticism. The Germans began by depreciating the achievements of English and French thinkers and glorifying their own philosophies as the most profound and noble expressions of the human soul. M. Félix Sartiaux pays them back, in part, in their own coin by weighing in the balance their greatest philosopher and finding him rather light in mental and moral weight. He repudiates "the intolerable and odious pretensions" of the Germans to be a great creative people, the educator of the human race, and declares that far from being initiators, they have nearly always been mere imitators, in philosophy as everywhere else. He thinks that the day will come when it will be clearly understood how superficial has been the influence of German metaphysics and particularly of the Kantian system, how its value has been exaggerated and what a modest rôle German thought has played in the history of general ideas. He feels that it is about time to put an end to the German intellectual propaganda which the French admiration for Kant has promoted, and to put the so-called sage of Königsberg in his proper place. That Kant's ethics should have won such success in France is to him a singular fact, and he proposes to show how utterly repugnant this confused and ambiguous system really is to the French spirit, wholly lacking as it is in generous and æsthetic elements and in the true appreciation of individuality, liberty, and humanity. It is true that Kant condemned falsehood, the violation of treaties, useless cruelty, the employment of treacherous methods in war, and the spirit of conquest and domination; but he deserves no special praise for that: these ideas formed part of the atmosphere of the eighteenth century. It is likewise true that Kant has condemned in advance the errors and pretensions into which an extreme self-confidence, a measureless pride, and the absence of a real civilization have carried Prussian Germany; but these judgments did not spring from the innermost principle of the Kantian ethics and are artificial additions to its thought. There is no relation between his principles and their applications. Although

the principles are represented as purely rational, they are the affirmations of a mysticism which withdraws itself from the control of reason, while the applications are partly an apologia of liberal French ideas, partly a plaidoyer for Prussian absolutism. The *Philosophy of Law* and the treatise on *Perpetual Peace* have been largely derived from French sources and do not really form part and parcel of the Kantian philosophy. All this would have become perfectly clear, in the opinion of M. Sartiaux, if scholars had made an effort to discover the psychological and historical origins of Kantian ethics and had been able to distinguish in it the subjective elements and the contributions of the moralists and jurists from which it borrowed.

M. Sartiaux emphasizes as a fact that Kant's training was exclusively religious and metaphysical, representing a combination of Protestant Pietism and Wolffian rationalism. He was not a *savant*, not a scientist either in spirit or in achievement; neither a mathematician nor a physicist nor a geologist nor a naturalist nor an economist nor a jurist nor an historian. Psychology was a closed book to him. It was metaphysics—his own metaphysics—that formed the center of his perspective. He speculates upon abstract notions whose meaning is not definitely determined and unfolds in logical form the relations in which they seem to stand. Revealing the attitude common to the religious soul and especially to Lutheran Pietism, he proceeds from unprovable assertions and in absolutistic fashion opposes them to one another. Knowledge is for him an ensemble of *apriori* and universal forms, united by necessary judgments, which the mind shut up in itself, as Kant in his own life, lays down in its seeming autonomy, which owe nothing whatever to experience, and which are applied to the external data without being able to interpenetrate them. The categorical imperative plays the same rôle with regard to moral ideas and the sentiments; under the guise of a subtle logic, the ethical system introduces the basal notions of Lutheran Protestantism. Then Kant constructs with pure entities of the mind and in the form of logical reasonings the world of physics and the world of morality, "a system of knowledge wholly grounded *apriori* upon pure concepts,"—an enterprise which is chimerical, it being impossible to deduce the entire reality, physical and moral, from a few abstract principles.

The *Metaphysics of Virtue* and the *Philosophy of Law* are nothing more than an amalgamation of the conceptions which divided German society in the last half of the eighteenth century: the moral ideas of Lutheran Christianity, the political ideas of enlightened despotism, and the moral-political ideas of French liberal philosophy. The

fundamental ideas of the Kantian ethics are at variance with all previous ethical thought. Kant aimed to be the Copernicus of ethics, pretending that its principles and true significance had been totally misunderstood by his predecessors. His system reverses the order in which philosophy and religion had conceived the relations of goodness and duty, of man and the world, of the world and God. It withdraws goodness and duty from the field of investigation, and makes the good will absolute. It breaks the intimate connection which moral, religious, and rational thought has always established between virtue and happiness. It stands isolated in the tradition of humanity; Kantism and humanism are irreconcilable opposites. To understand this morality completely, there is need of a penetrating psychological and social study of Kant, of his character and his life, the materials for which are at hand but have not been sufficiently utilized. After giving us a critical exposition of Kant's practical philosophy (pp. 25-238) and showing in detail its relation to other systems,—its place in history (pp. 241-355)—M. Sartiaux presents us with the results of such a study in a long final chapter, "Kant and Prussian Mentality" (pp. 356-433), in which this philosophy stands revealed as a finished type of Prussian morality, "a well-authenticated product of the soil and of the nation in which it was developed."

The book is not an impartial and objective study of Kant but a passionate attack upon his intelligence and his learning, upon his fitness and training to be a teacher of mankind; indeed, even his character is mercilessly analyzed and condemned, and his seemingly harmless idiosyncrasies and habits held up to public ridicule and scorn. M. Sartiaux performs his work of destruction with such zeal and thoroughness that the fair-minded reader cannot help but feel sorry for the dethroned philosophical monarch who had the misfortune to be born a Prussian. And yet the book deserves serious attention in those parts in which the author claims to have a better understanding of the subject than the many interpreters of the critical philosophy who have preceded him. Though the spirit of his work is violently antagonistic and at times abusive, it gives evidence of more than a superficial examination of Kant's writings; it presents reasons for its conclusions, and reasons, whether the result of love or hate, must be reckoned with. Indignation sometimes writes verses, and it is not impossible that indignation may detect what a less ruffled temper ignores. However that may be, I have found the critical and historical parts of the book interesting, refreshing, and suggestive; in spite of its unsympathetic and hostile tone, I appreciate the force of

many of the writer's criticisms, although it seems plain to me that he does not do Kant full justice. One feels impelled in studying the volume to go over the ground again in the hope of reaching a deeper and clearer understanding than before of Kant's practical philosophy; and an author who can arouse a new interest in an old task has not labored altogether in vain. Indeed, it will be necessary, in view of our war experiences, to reëxamine much of the ethical literature not only of the German people but of other peoples. Ethical and political principles must stand the test of experience, and we do not come to a full understanding and appreciation of our values until they are tried by fire, honored in the breach as well as in the observance. History must be constantly re-written in the light of great new events—the history of thought no less than social and political history. And I wonder, in view of all that has happened within the last few years, whether Kant's practical philosophy will cut such a sorry figure as it does in M. Sartiaux's mind. It does not seem possible that a thinker who declared that nothing in this world is absolutely good except the good will, and who, after all, defined the good will as the will to bring about a social order of rational beings, a kingdom of ends, in which no one should be treated as a mere means but always as an end, can be interpreted as countenancing the flagrant breach of treaties, the violation of international morality, and the relapse into barbarism of which the country of his birth stands condemned. Whatever may be the logical and psychological defects of Kant's ethical system—and they are many—and however short Kant himself may at times have fallen of his ideal (he did not believe that sainthood could be attained in this world), he certainly never intended his categorical imperative to serve as a cloak for immoralism of the Prussian or any other type. Our author portrays him as "*un vieux garçon prussien*, as an egoist, full of himself, anti-social and anti-æsthetic, devoid of generosity and real moral distinction." "One does not find in his life a single trait of devotion or generosity. He never consecrated himself to a person or a cause." He prudently abstained from discussing questions of the internal and external politics of his day. "He showed no interest in his family nor did he lend material aid to any of his pupils or disciples; we know the kind of reception he gave to Fichte, the greatest of these." "He had the taste for 'corporalism' and blind authority of which the categorical imperative is a magnificent and absurd expression. Like every good Prussian he possessed the fear and absolute respect which the august force of established power inspires." "He was exceedingly timorous, circumspect to the point of sacrificing what

appeared to be his strongest convictions to his tranquillity of mind." He could not brook intellectual opposition; he obstinately refused to enter into the ideas of other thinkers; indeed he was incapable of understanding philosophical thoughts other than his own. But even granting the faithfulness of this unattractive picture, can we say that it is a typically Prussian picture, and, what is more important, that it represents Kant's ideal of the perfect life? The question in which we are interested is not how did Kant live his life, but how did he think it ought to be lived? His failure to realize his ethical philosophy in practice is something which we mortals have no difficulty in understanding; it is not, however, to be taken as an indication of what he actually believed and taught.

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Leibniz. (Les Grands Philosophes.) Par CLODIUS PIAT. Paris, Félix Alcan, 1915.—pp. vii, 375.

The Abbé Piat, who has already contributed volumes on Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to the *Grands Philosophes* series, of which he is the editor, is not unmindful of the fact that some persons will regard the publication of his book on Leibniz as inopportune, indeed as premature. They will, he thinks, wonder why he did not await the appearance of the great edition of Leibniz's works in preparation by the Academies of Paris and Berlin, without which perfect certitude concerning the views of this philosopher is presumed to be out of the question. However that may be, he is right in believing that students of the history of philosophy will not blame him for not delaying his own book until the publication of "*la grande édition*," which could not have been completed, under ordinary circumstances, in less than twenty-five years, and the coming of which may now be postponed indefinitely. It is more than likely that Dr. Piat's able and interesting work will prove of service even after the mass of manuscripts upon which eager scholars busied themselves before the war have been subjected to further scrutiny. It is possible, of course, that documents may be unearthed which will utterly transform our ideas of Leibniz's philosophical teachings, but the chances are against it. From what we already know of his unpublished writings it seems that once he had formulated his theories he did not materially change them, and that he never abandoned the leading thoughts of his philosophy as they had been developed, let us say by the year 1675. (See Dr. Willy Kabitz, *Die Philosophie des jungen Leibniz*, 1909, and Professor Ivan Iagodinski, *Leibnitziana elementa philosophiæ arcanæ de summa*